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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001010

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SUBJECT: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: NSA RASSOUL ON PAKISTAN,
IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Afghan National Security Advisor Rassoul told visiting U.S. Delegation to the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership talks that the situation in Helmand remained problematic due to the volatile mix of drug traffickers and Taliban. Unlike six months ago, Rassoul believed Iran was more nervous about the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Afghan relations with Central Asian republics were improving. Rassoul did not think Hekmatyar's calls for reconciliation were genuine but the Government was discussing how to respond. Rassoul saw the current engagement with Pakistan as positive and looked forward to the next Jirga Commission meeting in Kabul in April. Afghanistan was engaging the Gulf states on improving relations with Pakistan. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) During March 13 meeting with Department of Defense Under Secretary for Policy Eric Edelman, State Department Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Richard Boucher, National Security Council Special Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan Meghan O'Sullivan, Ambassador Neumann, and US Delegation to the U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership talks, National Security Advisor Rassoul briefed on the situation in Helmand, Iran, regional and domestic issues, and Pakistan.

Helmand

¶3. (C) Rassoul assessed that three of the four provinces in the South had improved but Helmand remained problematic. In Kandahar, Operation Medusa was successful in restoring people's confidence in NATO/ISAF's ability to dislodge the Taliban. The ANSF also proved they could perform well and refugees are also returning, Rassoul said. Helmand, however, remained problematic due to the combination of drug traffickers and Taliban in the area. Musa Qala, governance problems, and poppy all combined to create a volatile situation, Rassoul explained. He believed Governor Wafa was doing a good job, knew the tribal areas, but was not spending

enough time in the province. He had been in Pakistan helping prepare for the jirgas but promised to be back and spend time in Helmand this summer. Rassoul saw Kajaki dam as the top priority. He said military operations were going well, causing the enemy to flee into surrounding provinces.

14. (C) Boucher noted that Pakistan had stepped up pressure on the Taliban, forcing mid-level Taliban to cross the border. He expressed concern about the north, particularly activities of drug traffickers. Rassoul said drug trafficking in the north was following "normal patterns". The Taliban were trying to infiltrate the north but better governance there was making it hard for them, according to Rassoul.

Iran

15. (C) Rassoul noted an increase in Iranian activity with the Taliban in the west. Edelman stated the U.S. had been concerned over the past six months about Iranian IRGC Oods Force activity in Iraq. He said it was nefarious and destabilizing but for the moment not as lethal as Iraq. It gave cover to Shia groups to lay IEDs and conduct other military activities. Edelman said it would be ominous if the Taliban and Iran started cooperating in Afghanistan employing use of explosively formed penetrators (EFPs).

16. (C) Rassoul said six months ago the Iranians were confident the U.S. would not attack. He could not explain why but said the Iranians were now concerned. The U.S. presence in Afghanistan also made them nervous. Rassoul said there were "different Irans", not a unitary state. Asked if

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he had communications with Iran regarding contacts with the Taliban, Rassoul said that Iran denies it at the diplomatic level in Kabul and there is no contact with them on the subject in Tehran. Rassoul said Afghanistan had some evidence of such activities.

Regional Issues

17. (C) Rassoul debriefed on his recent visit to Uzbekistan where he had frank diplomatic discussions for the first time, he said, as relations had been frozen. Rassoul described the Uzbeks as willing to re-engage and saw a new positive environment there. He told the Uzbeks that U.S. and Afghan forces were not supporting anti-Uzbek factions and were in fact helping to protect the border. He said relations with Tajikistan were also positive, as they were with Turkmenistan. Rassoul was encouraging the latter to provide electricity to northern Afghanistan. Kazakhstan was interested in investing in Afghanistan, particularly in copper mining, Rassoul noted.

Amnesty Bill

18. (C) Rassoul stated the Government of Afghanistan was satisfied with the final version of the Amnesty Bill. He explained that everything was removed from the bill that was contrary to the Constitution, sharia law, human rights, and citizens' concerns. President Karzai personally worked hard on the bill. Rassoul said human rights activists are still not happy with it but Karzai felt the important issues had been addressed.

Next Elections

19. (C) O'Sullivan remarked that the next elections were approaching soon and asked if there would be changes in the election laws and if people were already thinking about them. Rassoul said there were active discussions underway and the

campaign had already started. He pointed to rumors that President Karzai was not planning to run and suggested that Karzai declare his candidacy soon if he planned to run. He noted that in Parliament one opposition group was organizing itself actively. He believed the majority supported the President but they were not organizing themselves properly. Rassoul personally thinks that Karzai should organize a political group to support his movements and policies (not a political party), so everyone will know where he stands.

Detainees

¶10. (C) Edelman stated that the U.S. wanted to return detainees held in Bagram and GITMO and asked about the status of the detainee bill. Rassoul explained that he had originally done a lot of work on the draft, but when it went to Karzai, "it encountered problems". It then went to the Chief Justice where legal issues had to be ironed out. The policy is still to take back the prisoners, Rassoul emphasized.

Hekmatyar

¶11. (C) Rassoul said the Taliban are denying that Hekmatyar wants to reconcile. Rassoul personally did not think Hekmatyar was sincere and did not put any credence in rumors he wanted to come in. He said the Afghan government was discussing what to do. Nevertheless, Rassoul believed it significant that there was now a split between HIG and the Taliban. He said HIG had a political agenda inside Afghanistan, whereas the Taliban have more of an Islamist

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agenda. He characterized Hekmatyar as being all for himself, while the Taliban was a "different creature".

Pakistan

¶12. (C) Rassoul reported that Afghanistan was now engaging the Gulf states more on relations with Pakistan. Saudi Arabia in particular had influence. Rassoul explained that Afghanistan was looking for more cooperation from Pakistan on dealing with the Taliban, especially cutting funding and eliminating sanctuaries. Rassoul observed that more funding had been flowing to the Taliban lately, particularly better and more sophisticated weapons and financing from Gulf states.

¶13. (C) Rassoul reported that there were no plans to see Prime Minister Azziz soon, as he was not willing to come to Afghanistan. Boucher said the U.S. would continue to encourage him. On the jirgas, Rassoul said Pakistan wanted to delay, saying it needed more time. For Afghanistan, the sooner the better, he said. Rassoul saw the current engagement as positive and looked forward to the next Jirga Commission meeting in Afghanistan in April.

¶14. (C) Boucher asked if there were any issues he should raise in Pakistan. Rassoul said the message should be the following: Afghanistan is not an enemy of Pakistan. There is evidence of economic exchange bringing greater prosperity. Afghanistan is willing to discuss any issue with Pakistan, except issues undermining its territorial integrity.

¶15. (U) The US Delegation cleared this cable.

NEUMANN